Mariana Romo-Carmona



Life -Celia Miralles

Sobrevivir y otros complejos

Narrative Poems in Englillano

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For June.
A la suerte.

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Y en estos días de invierno de 2011, dedico el alma de este libro a la memoria de mi hermana, Claudia Rosa.

Contents

Poemas en dos idiomas: Prólogo

Hace mucho, mucho tiempo, cuando yo era niña, los autores de libros no sacaban buenas fotos. Esa es la verdad. Verdad? Because they weren't necessarily photogenic or even beautiful people. Habían fotos borrosas de escritores en los periódicos, en blanco y negro and pixillated so you could get lost in the face of Gabriela Mistral, no longer looking at the real shadow beneath her eye, o el rictus de su boca, sino el lugar donde el espacio blanco makes contact with the black space. El espacio de las páginas amarillentas of a newspaper. Sometimes there were photos of writers taken after a conference, standing together, arms comradely over shoulders or stiffly formal, sentados tras un micrófono y un vaso de agua, con los codos en la mesa.
And from these historical bits of real life, quite often, an editor would choose an indelible portrait to place on the back cover of a book. Pero para mí, escribir was a state of mind.
Una vez, en la escuela primaria, la Arriarán, un lugar mítico que me formó más que mi propia madre, our teacher sent two of us to interview an author in his home. It was a great honor, of course. Debe haber sido en 1963, when the author had recently won a literature prize. Fuimos con cuadernos y lápices.
Benjamín Subercasaux was a real writer who lived near the school and we could walk from there to his apartment. La profesora lo debe haber llamado, found his number in the phone book, and he simply agreed to talk with two fifth graders.
The photo on the back of his books no era foto espontánea, it seemed taken by a photographer. Se veía serio y respetable. Y mi secreto es que ya sabía que dentro de mi existía un escritor,

tal vez con lentes y bigote, the serious type, but definitely me, walking with my classmate to the interview, notebook in hand, navy blue pleated skirt and sailor jacket with three red piping stripes, trenzas largas con cinta blanca y zapatos negros and white socks. The writer spoke extemporaneously about life and the new generation— mine, ours! I couldn't write fast enough, I never could, y era obvio que él esperába que copiáramos sus palabras verbatum. Intenté garabatear la mayor cantidad de palabras que pude until my hand cramped. I remember he said, "Cada día, nuestro mundo… blah-blah-blah…". I listened to his ideas. I watched him, fascinated, su mente, sus pensamientos convirtiéndose en palabras.

I don't know how I knew, or why I wanted to, ser escritor. No sabía cuando podría comenzar, but I know that every word I've written for the past fifty years, buena o mala, ha salido de mis átomos, creating me from the inside out. I think I am older than that writer was, then; I am two years older than Gabriela Mistral was when she died… y me pregunto, cómo se llega a la fotografía que muestra el alma, ahora que ya he aprendido a escribir? ¿cuál es la relación entre el vivir y el escribir when one is approaching time? I don't know, but I think that if one has chosen to be a writer, es porque al llegar al momento en que tu imagen, that photo, the way other people see you matches the way you feel, entonces, finalmente se puede vivir.

Preámbulo

“Gracias a la vida, que me ha dado tanto…”

Violeta Parra. 1917-1967

Pasos en el pasado

La fiebre

es como una maraña de hebras que se acumulan a mis pies.
dentro de la sensación de desorden hay una superficie lisa
perfecta
que se insinúa pero se pierde
es un vaho
la maraña vuelve
siento una voz que me habla
aunque no fue entonces que lo supe—
que el miedo que tenía era al desorden   sino que
mucho después
desesperando
logro agarrarme a algo
y reconozco lo que es: miedo
al enredo de hebras   que es un des
orden.

El sueño

son varios.
el primero comienza con una noche
un caminar por una ciudad que no conozco
aunque me parece haber estado allí
tiene rasgos de algo
debo llegar allí, a ese espacio largo y me adentro
por calles que debería conocer hasta

que   me pierdo
irremediablemente   lo sé   helada
a veces me pasa algo extraño
parece que encuentro una memoria dentro
del sueño
y entonces sé que he estado en esa ciudad, en
esa casa vieja con esa gente   allí
me conocen. Yo los conozco a ellos.   Somos
antiguos.
me devuelvo por calles que todavía no terminan
en algo familiar   quiero
volver al lugar y claro
al tratar de volver hay un doblés en el sueño
las calles han cambiado   es otra
ciudad y cuando llego ya no soy
la misma   ni son ellos
casi me despierto y creo
que cuando me despierte de veras
resolveré el enigma de dónde
estuve.

pero despierto de veras. veo
que no es posible
que en mi pequeña vida no ha habido tiempo
para vivir esa otra vida
para ser esa otra niña que
solo emerge en sueños

sin embargo el sueño queda como memoria
y en alguna noche de las que vendrán
voy a soñar
haber estado allí de nuevo.

Muchos años después, la repisa

lo de la repisa ocurrió entonces,
cerca de la fiebre y del sueño
lo que sucede ahora es algo
maravilloso
cuando de
repente veo la repisa como clave casi no creo
lo simple que ha sido
solo cuarenta y tres   o
cuarenta y cuatro años para saber por qué
le tengo miedo a ese
algo.
como todos los niños me muevo
como caminando bajo el agua. Todo
es un sueño que me pesa en los párpados
a veces me muevo rapidísimo
pero en general la vida se mueve lenta
las vacaciones de verano duran
siete meses y a veces
más
cuando salgo a jugar pasan horas.

en cada cuneta hay ciudades
por la vereda pasan ejércitos y si acaso existe
una poza de agua pues batallas
marítimas muertes gloriosas   lo más injusto
es que las cosas más entretenidas del mundo ocurren
a la hora de volver a casa.
cosa parecida sucede
con la repisa. Ahí   entre algunos juguetes están
todos mis libros   los que leo siete veces y
mis revistas. No sé qué diablos; esa repisa
tenía un duende que la des
ordenaba. Siempre. Y especialmente
cuando venía alguien de visita   había que or
denar   la tarea más difícil del mundo. Tratando de cumplirla
también me demoraba horas. Leía revistas de nuevo
me sacaba la vuelta   era
algo dificilísimo. El puro des-   *orden* me
mareaba me daba
dolor de estómago y sin embargo
no podía. La tarde llegaba   las luces
amarillaban
los brazos de plomo me pesaban
y no   no había caso
llegaba mi madre a retarme mientras   dirigía la
arremetida
y al rato
ya quedaba la repisa ordenada

algo le había pasado al monstruo aquél
mamá lo había derrotado
dentro de mí quedaba un sabor amargo
porque el monstruo rondaba
al día siguiente   de esos días que no duraban mucho
la repisa se des-   *ordenaría*
y yo andaría a la deriva en algún
barco pirata
para que no me pillaran y
me condenaran a *or-*
denar…

Fiebre de nuevo

a veces veía la maraña como una   conciencia
que me hablaba   que me reconocía ya
porque yo era la niña que venía en un barco
una balsa de Caron, de pies primero
adentrándome en la noche
y la maraña misma era un peso sobre
los pies   el pecho
una cosa lisa   perfec
tamente suave   una esfera de color lechoso que
allí por los pies se manifes
taba
me deses   peraba porque si
despertaba

sentía la fiebre   calor   de todas las
cosas que dolían
y al dormirme segundos mas tarde caía

Fiebre otra vez II

y al caerme en el pozo aquél   en el
Río aquél
ya sabía que me iba a encontrar
me hundía
no despertaba sino para hundirme y allí
estaba la conciencia mía
el enredo   era peso fantasma sobre los pies
era enredo era   la cosa más lisa del mundo
era enredo era
perfec
tamente
orden y desorden
era caos
perfección.

Túneles

dormir no era lo mismo
que los sueños. Dormir
era algo que ocurria a intervalos regulares
regimentado por sábanas   noches de frio

baldosas
tardes de estufa
el contraste de cielos de acero   el suelo
de baldosas rojas
la noche no caía
el día no alumbraba
solo era dormir
o no dormir

a este dormir llegaron mis sueños
como de viaje
¿dónde habían estado?
Llegaron con maletas   los reconocí de inmediato
con personalidades   y
peculiaridades
los sueños como libros
que se volvían a leer   los que venían nuevos
y los que continuaban
a la noche siguiente
entre ellos distinguí al de los túneles
espacios apretados
chimeneas
tumbas
bajo pirámides
me encontraba viajando
o tratando de volver a casa
nada en la aventura quedaba claro

sino el final   en el que me despertaba   sofocada
había que pasar por un espacio muy estrecho
lo había hecho varias veces en el mismo
sueño   subir por escaleras   hallar una buhardilla
y encaramarme hasta la superficie
pero al final no   el espacio se disminuía   me atascaba
a penas había lugar para la cabeza   empujaba
con los hombros
faltaba aire
despertaba
porque no quería seguir: de eso
estaba consciente.

Cabeza de serpiente

en el sueño de perderme habia
mucho que recorrer
a veces llegaba a una ciudad en tren
al bajarme comprobaba que no sabía cómo
llegar de una estación de tren para encontrar
un vecindario
un lugar familiar   con veredas
casas árboles esquinas almacenes quioscos__
las estaciones de tren quedaban   *en el centro*—
el Centro era cosa de grandes
mientras que la vida conocida transcurría

en vecindarios. ¿cómo se llegaba
de un lado a otro?
No comprendía transiciones.

pero en el sueño de los túneles   o en el de
persecusión (la puerta de casa era de goma flexible
que no alcanzaba a llegar al marco) un monstruo
persiguiéndome
a veces veía mi propia cara emerger
gigante
telón de fondo de los sueños
una cara grande que se dirigía a mi misma:
esto es un sueño   me decía   *no te asustes*
y despertaba
me desenredaba y aparecía consciente sobre la cama
recordando otros sueños   una selva   una cara grande
alumbrando por sobre las copas de los árboles
cara de niña   cuerpo de serpiente azteca   devorándose
a sí misma—quién era
esa conciencia que me protegía
que me guiaba por las calles de mis sueños hasta encontrar
una casa vieja con reja de fierro
con ventanales altos farol de jardín y dentro
aquella sala donde se servía el té   yo hacía una
venia y
me pedían que cantara algo para ellos
los antiguos:

seres sin edad con caras desvanescientes caras
irrecordables pero tan precisas que si las viera en un
atardecer cualquiera
me llevarían volando para aquella vida donde yo viví
hasta que nací de nuevo

Ciclo de pesadillas

una vez que conquisté la fiebre
pasaban años en que no me perdía y ya
no recordaba ni creía que todo eso hubiese sido
haber sido   haber vivido   saber
un manojo de pesadillas me asaltaron pero escapé
primero de una tumba una pirámide que penetraba la tierra
en un pasillo estrecho   yo arqueóloga gateaba
hasta llegar al centro de la pirámide y allí
me ahogaba   no había salida sino que
de vuelta hacia arriba
al mismo tiempo soñaba andar perdida en una ciudad nueva
en un edificio con millares de escaleras tragaluces y balcones
desde los cuales nunca se veía nada
cada piso caracoleaba o desembocaba en una calle
distinta   mientras tanto me ahogaba en la pirámide
hurgando en sus entrañas
empujando con los hombros y los codos
irremediablemente perdida por las calles que nunca volvían
a un edificio igual al anterior: las escaleras cambiaban

las puertas eran ciegas   aunque vislumbraba luz
de repente mi conciencia de serpiente verde
me apeló: *esto es un sueño*   me dije
pide señas. Instantáneamente
detuve a dos transeúntes para preguntarles—   *¿cómo se llega?*

Los pasos recobrados

tal vez eran dos corrientes   un nacer
interno y una culminación de un viaje larguísimo
al obtener direcciones para llegar al lugar acordado
me acuerdo que corrí por el sueño lo más rápido que pude
casi consciente   casi
muriéndome de la ansiedad de no despertar
hasta que llegué   encontré la salida   la entrada
el pasillo que me llevaba   el callejón que desembocaba
las rejas que se abrían   por una vereda iluminada vi
una pared de ladrillo   bajé por escalones   subí por ascensores
y allí estaban todos
ya no recuerdo quiénes   pero todos
era sólo eso   se trataba de preguntarle a alguien   casi
me reía aunque resultaba difícil por lo de la escasez
de oxígeno—después de todo estaba atascada en la pirámide
en el sueño de al lado sumergiéndome de nuevo en lo inconsciente

sólo puedo murmurar que se trataba de un terror horrible
eso de zambullirme en la densidad hasta que los músculos
del cuello y de mi pecho   palpitaban   espasmos de
un último esfuerzo
hasta nacer. Allí desperté.   primero desperté
dormida pero pronto
me pude desenredar de veras   respirar   buscar en el
telón
la cabeza que ya no hablaba   que no era yo
que la tenía puesta
claro   serpiente entera   mares azules
naves
navegando hacia islas-ombligos   en los destellos
de sol sobre las olas azulinas   abro los ojos
respiro a fondo
hoy he vuelto.

Sobrevivir

Si sintieras que las piernas te llevan
corriendo a la orilla del agua
con el sube y baja de la cabeza al correr
cantando en vez de llorar por estas memorias llenas de arena
el grito mojado de una gaviota
con el peso del tiempo
y de los sueños…

If my legs were running instead of
standing in diminutive tidepools receding
soup of salt water and urchins
night of thick blue
ink of an octopus lost and dried for the writing…
Ya no te moverías sino que quedarías en un trance
de noches estrelladas
de jotas que se bailan con brío a la luz de esa luna
austral
where I was too young to know yet I knew that moon was Chile.

Te despertaste a la consciencia
en las veredas polvorientas de un barrio donde la gente
festejaba las puestas de sol
new years' eves were collective celebrations
donde llenaban botellas extranjeras con piedras, bencina
y un trapo para lanzarlas al cielo,
con orgullo. Los tíos y los padres y vecinos

who were other people on the other days of the year. Tú eras
pequeña.
The bursting satellites and elliptic star paths you witnessed then
told you who you were.
You knew there was cause to celebrate
Your childhood was made of ritual— homemade rockets
for the neighborhood bachanal
zapatitos pintados de blanco a fin de año,
chimneyless, snowless but waiting nevertheless
for some Norse legend to come and fill them
with Ambrosoli candy and chocolate.

Beyond rituals there were days blending with shadows
there were nights that came with the radio on
with a sadness for the loss of the day. Were you alone?
your mother cried, your father ran away, and you learned
to run from the sting of her leather strap. If you were running
now,
along the water's edge
You'd want to know which side the ocean was on

If I was a nymph in a forest with rules
there might be a queen whose mantle would spread
whose love was renewed every new year's day
by the lighting of rockets and finding a place
to put baby shoes in a windowless room
Winter. It rained. I was dazzled by the world I saw

watching the universe upside down. Winter is summer in
the southern hemisphere
and on the prettiest month the weather changed
to let me awaken once more. August. The rains stopped.

Your home was at the end
of a blue-and-yellow passageway: your amphitheater
the water pooled on the tiles before spring, and on the last day
your birthday came, the sky upside down
reflected on the rainwater blue and yellow
no trees, no birds only the change
in the line of the sun
rain on the sidewalk
silence for the end of the cold
it was your neighborhood, your
birthday, your waking up as a girl.

This was a dangerous time. Not for them
but for me, who writes this
The year was nineteen fifty-something, there was
eisenhower here and drowned faggots in the river there
korean war here and miners dying in the north where you
hadn't
gotten to yet—
there was CIA, Caritas powdered milk and injections
for poliomelytis
but your father never left, did he, only uncles sleeping by day

and mothers with migraines insisting daughters should
excel at school and will them to live
but all fathers drank on weekends and uncles
were sad connections   witnesses
sometimes
to fierce beatings that daughters endured
punished again by the beat of the strap

These were rituals   the earth blooms again
little white shoes are filled by the hands of a
legend from the north   O! Precarious life
young women make hard mothers:
Take your punishment, but do not dare cry, look up or
force the punisher to acknowledge with a look of insolence—
or worse— do not be silent do not dare to withstand this
punishment
in silence.

Hard womanhood   her every right, yet
You   hold all the cards.
You've waited in shallow waters, salty pools
black urchins and sea stars, barnacles adhered so tightly
the skin would bleed if pulled off
one cannot
speak

The woman was hard, it's true

from the day you woke to years sliding past
there was music that beat in your girl's chest over seasons
and the uncorking of self-conscious joy
fireworks
stars burning carbon ellipses in the night
shoes on a window frame by a cellophane tree
chocolates from Argentina
the sharp hand marked a new season and the girl
was never the same girl since

—and that is another dream   Come back
the rivers swell   I said
the shacks lean the willows lean over
as perilously as earthquakes
the train speeds by and
when it gets to Concepción
I know that this train will rock   left to right
On the track

Crossing the Bío-Bío   wide and marvelous
a river fit for nightmares   formidable enough
to withstand a century
I know I've returned to run along the track
to see the train pull up at the station
in Chillán
and though indeed there's no more   bread
in memory there was plenty

a basket like my grandmother's basket   bread
Bread of dreams
covered in cloth   a golden seduction   breath
Aroma the kiss of my mouth treacherous biting indelible
As desire

Puntillismo

hombro clavícula
hueco
salado
cuello
pelo lavado
lóbulo
lengua saliva vellos
rodeo suspiro
uñas picor picazón
escalofrío

nape
of the neck
caress lobe saliva
murmur
surrounding
brazo
cintura
tightness sudando verano
rodilla almohada
palabra arábica
ventana abierta
brisa softly billowing
visillos vellos cuello
throat depression finger
tongue swallow
alondra wings plumas

abierto
campanas chimes cielo
sábanas mullido hair
pillow shoulder
narrow espalda
shadow breast debajo suave seda

mi mano hermana
su mano mana
me mama manantial
cascada color
vientre ombligo
sombrío sonrisa
ocre rojizo café pardo
oliva violeta selva
salvaje
arrecife piedra
frescura
deseo sed cristalina
rechazo insistencia
halago
olvido párpados
musgo ingle
salado comino concha
rosácea salmon morado
oscuro velvet
deep silk rose húmedo

de mar marino beso
difuso ansia colores
crescendo picante intenso
ajo molido dedos
pimentón hambre
buceo ultramarino aguamarina

arcilla olla de greda
pino pelea habas centellas
medianoche sudor
dientes aliento
pulmón
pecho destino

profundo
vertiente dulce de leche
náusea
embrujo
labio empuje placenta
dildo dedo dedal
margaritas campo salsa
pasto nubes
visiones
cansancio
calambre fuerza tensión
olores dolores risa
amores

ritmo canción pausa—
esperanza pregunta
ritmo ritmo vaivén
deslizo
caída
presión
arcoiris
precipicio
burbujas—
fondo hierba bostezo
apaga la luz.

Catechism

do not speak of arrows
do not speak of golden keys

language is the point
to penetrate your secrets
of an
arrow
do not speak of eagles
do not speak of shafts

i begat language and language
do not speak of rivers parting your gates
begat
me
do not speak of rays of light
sharp-
tongued
do not speak of thunderbolts
lapping
do not speak of train wrecks
do not speak of enormous fish with silver scales wild horses
fertile valleys conquering gladiators or horses
at all

i am all three Pages

let me rest

                of desire
moon beams or any other

kind of intrusion
let me rest

                i am s/he eternal She
do not speak of arrows

              who mounts
or golden keys
or prince consorts
                                                  s/he who
rises   dives
or child madonnas
                                                  Emerges
or members and memberships of seminal societies
                                 fertile and sufficient in
primordial
fountains or

                waters
any other kind of hegemonic knowledge

do not speak of armies   especially
cauldrons
invading armies
avoid christian references
broth
made of stars
and iconography
do not insinuate obelisks pharaohs or pyramids
unless they be breasts
do not speak of comet tails protrusions socket
wrenches   fecundity spins
periscopes or any other kind of envy do not
round as
wheels
presume
seven
deep
do not presume
do not.
I carry
births fully sentient

WordEvolution

ordinary words bear no magic
in an ordinary string
one day we learn   order
orDer Or-der or der-or Der-or
the task   is-as impossible-as   poetry
in-pieces
a bookshelf in disarray   a child's
books   papers and comic books
toys   one of them a wooden
hollow mushroom with a red top
hiding an imaginary elf
suddenly the world is trouble   no way to fix
this shelf   a task too great   the dis
array has grown   formidable
a six-year-old's hands cannot re
compose such dis
aster

living in the present glistens facets to
mirroreachaspectofachildhood waking with wings still attached
to yesterday's flights of fancy: this is who I have become.
But in the present there are nometaphorsfororder though I have
become adept at handling any mess that once would loom
overpowering.   I brood over what's changed.   From
bookshelves I graduate to
adolescence.   What bookshelves were to childhood life
becomes to life

the same kind of leaden
inertia takes hold and there is no exit
itwasinsurmountable.

fascination comes to the child when
the mother joins her in the task   after
a brief reprimand
how to explain that in the process of
ordering another idea took hold and there
was a book she had to read again at least
look at her favorite pages
it was *cuore* perhaps or *little women*
though as she grew older it could have been *treasure island*
she turns back and sees the magazines and papers and other
knick knacks still in disarray
and a sick feeling rises inside   something
like a pain inside her muscles
a sweet pain like a wave indeed a wave
of physical knowledge that
becomes voice   becomes
consciousness
telling her it's time to move   to move
here-look here you do-it-like-this one
book behind the other   tall ones on this side
the short ones go here and it seems like an in
cantation   canto   chanting   to her here look this

is how-you-do-it she almost falls into it inhabits
that place that is absorbing like a game of the image
ination but she doesn't know herself here   not yet….

is this what happened isthiswhathappened can it be that simple
that basic and still explain the anguish   that entering a place
of awake consciousness   of deliberate action I could see a
rhythm to it   a purpose   something that took over and had a
movement of its own that besides placing me in the **real world**
it would make me conscious of being in the now but awake not
like achildplayingadventures or lost in reading a book for the
umpteenth time

the in
cantation was not mine

interesting or admirable
that she was able to extract herself at this point
whole
still whole
and plunk herself right back in the   midst
of disarray   the place where the piles of things that
are the same size no longer
make sense   they speak another tongue
she extracts herself and plunks-herself right back into
the book she was reading
she stays there

the slightly annoying slightly painful feeling rises up
her limbs
but she learns to inhabit the discomfort of shirking
her tasks or even
to displace the place
where awareness washes up on her skin

thatsillyphrase being in the now becomes key though because over the years there was a war constantly raging and the two sides were distant families only I didn't know it. I never did learn the magic words that caused one to enter the place where the bookshelf was fixed to perfection always in work there was the feeling that I was leaving something undone a crucial thing

so that by the time work was writing I shirked that too. Preferring to inhabit the sweet pain up my limbs notsosweetanguish is a better word until the pain got so bad and the time so close that I had to write and I wrote in a flash of passionate inspiration inhabiting that moment completely and feeling that the incantatory words would fail me

the spell would be broken I would plummet back to earth without finishing I fought wars up there the one threatening to wake the other sometimes deliberately I threw my own wooden shoes in the machine and by the time I finished theworkfinishedby theduedate

I knew if I'd started sooner it would be better much better yet the lead in my limbs the argument disinte g r a t e s f r o m h e r e there is no argument it was a sickness! I would not wade in that pool of creativity unless someone pushed me in

suddenly she knows
it has only taken forty-three or
forty-four years
she can construct images with ordinary
words the lead
in her arms has been replaced by
another sweet pain one
that strikes when the wording meets the idea
it could strike anywhere
she knows how to answer it
how to delve how to wade in
along the way the magic chimes but
see how she can hypnotize herself the bookshelf bah!
That's nothing.

that's no thing. To be fair she is still studying the nature of the trance.

Stupid Verses

"they stacked the stiffs outside the door
they made, I reckon, a cord or more."
From Flannery O'Connor's notes.

When there's nothing on your mind
there is nothing in your mind
and nothing in your mind is better than
not a thing in your mind.
They stacked the corpses, leí en un juego de palabras
que amontonaron cadáveres en aquellos versos
my humor turns con el chirriar de las visagras
a door on hinges que se abre en una cantina rural
por ningún lado aparace Flannery O'Connor
but I hear the clatter of voices falling
in a barroom
the sour cadence of
edicts   life told by the pitcher
draft foam a cord of wood brawling
un anciano contando su vida entre cervezas
what did I hear the first time I
read a minimized version of life
instead I went too far and saw the faces
of broken bodies outside my door.

Lección para la vida

(Instructions on how *to be*)

Let me tell you something:
Si tú eres the type of person
que le dice a un amigo
"I will copy the manhattan phonebook
and bring it to you next Tuesday"
tú vas a estar ahí parada
on the corner of 14th street
con las copias bajo el brazo
and your friend will not show up.
Así es que déjame decirte una cosa:
tú tienes que ser más caradura
that means you need a thick skin
not a hard face
eso quiere decir that you say to people:
escuse me
you have me confused with someone
a quien le importa un bledo.

Advice para tu prima

Advice para tu prima cuando llegue

Te voy a decir dos o tres cositas:
the united states is an empire,
don’t buy anything on 42nd street, and remember
in new york you pay for your own lunch.

We Were All Going To Be Queens

"…And Lucila who spoke to the river
and the mountain and fields of cane
under the moons of madness
was given a real kingdom of her own."

Gabriela Mistral, from *Todas íbamos a ser reinas*
(We were all going to be queens) 1938

Cuando yo salí del closet
I wanted a big pocket watch
I wanted everything big:
Un reloj de bolsillo
Con una cadena de plata
And big Dunham boots to hike the trails
Where I went to find the truth
Of my baby-dyke soul
Una camisa de franela
Blue and green with a big old plaid
A belt
From Provincetown
Where I fell asleep on the beach
Leyendo a Cortázar y a Gabriela Mistral
Todas íbamos a ser reinas
Except for me.

Poetry Reading

You listened to the wounded poet
declaim
I am a walking   side effect
for what else was left of him
Along the river run   gray and rain   fog and rain
You recall the dead   poet's words
Die, *daddy*
And when you were small
la palabra suicida seemed to you
the word for those people who fly
jumping off from airplanes
body surfing to a thousand feet   above the earth
paracaidista
was the word you wanted
Caidista
Along the river run   gray and rain   fog and rain
Die, *daddy*
Sylvia sadly stated
Suicida was the right word
Paracaidista   Someone expert at falling
The tall wounded poet rises
Approaches the mike
He is a walking side effect
For what else is left
to say?
Retreat, Papi. Or you'll die.

Añoranza de voces

Camino por alfombrados de hojas, mirando álamos
mirándose
por un encaje de velos lilas
de árboles que no se visten
todavía.
Los álamos delgados son
niñas bailando
pero tristes.

En otra parte del bosque
yo sé que unas coníferas esperan
con troncos ajados
olores casi chilenos
una cisterna oscura
un banco de piedra
y una estatua del cupido Amor llena de musgo—
allí quise encontrarme
escondida y sin embargo
los álamos que diviso más lejos
me llaman.

Her lover comes home

her lover comes home   she takes
her gloves off when she walks
in the door   the bike helmet
unravels a scarf while she
leans the bicycle against the wall and
her body against her
her cheeks are cold but her lips
the feel of long ago hunger
the wallet from her back pocket   ipod
earphones keys pocket-drive loose change
and lays these things on the table
reaches for her with a kiss
so many items   clothing to remove   it's
so cold outside
by the time the daywear comes off
and the favorite t-shirt plays
nightshirt on the body
so many items of talk have crossed those lips
checkbook bank statement grocery list
her mouth is hungry for something
artichokes goat cheese prune butter
bedtime
is a long way off

Alimentum Poems

Poem I: Culinary Insecurity
When you don’t cook you think you
can’t ever make lovers
close their eyes while they taste your
bisque or neighbors mmh-hm as they
bite borscht bits of red and cream.
When you don’t cook your
guests blink at the size
of the crab cake on their plate
can’t possibly- and- oh it’s gone.
But you don’t cook and you think: ”Fluke.”
I’ll never have this much luck
again.
Poem II: When I’m 58
You get up first and your waking up
is noisy:
kettle rattle and cups and grumble
at anything I forgot to wash last night.
But I sleep again with the ache
on my back from the cold of worry
the heavyweight Bichon against
my legs (she never stirs) and soon
there’s coffee for me & lox & goat cheese;
your bike is gone and my worries minced
I love you more in my sleep & the dog
the salmon bits of my waking up.

Poem III: Depression Menu

Not that kind of depression.
Flour, water, grease; these, I hear
were the ingredients of 1929 for biscuits.
Twice-brewed tea, day-old toasted ends and
flowered cup in 1958.
In 2011 it's coffee and
computer poems and correcting papers;
make plans for two-thousand & twelve
for an immigrant's lifetime
to celebrate and let's
have chocolate to medicate
the other kind.

Mundos

No more worlds but a death
[Ya no más mundos sino una muerte]
that comes in shades of night to San Antonio
[que llega en sombras por la noche a San Antonio]
where the sea's blue orb keeps watch
[donde el orbe azul del mar vigila]
the gauze of nightmares still about
[la gaza de pesadillas que todavía ronda]
your neck   O Death   that I have
[por tu cuello   O muerte]
seen your cold limbs take
[que ya he visto tus brazos fríos]
me from my bed
[arrancarme de la cama]

my dreaming eye
[aquel ojo mío que sueña]
returning haunted to
[vuelve espantado a las arenas]
bare sands   phantasm on the edge
[desnudas   fantasma en la orilla]
of the pines   the sea
[de los pinos   y el mar]
a cup to quench and deeply my hands
[un pocillo para saciar mi sed y las manos]
are wrapped in yesterdays'
[me las envuelvo profundas en la resaca]

undertow   braids from that sea
[de ayer   trenzas de la noche]
welled thick beneath the veil of your
[apozándose gruesas bajo]
eyes and I do
[el velo de tus ojos y yo sí   me atrevo]
presume to see your whirring night's
[a presenciar el zumbido]
approach.
[nocturno mientras te acercas.]

Brother Quixote

my brother and I were don quixote
he had his voices and I
had my horse
the blades skewed our vision   the wind
pushed us head on
to charge at the giant mills

never children together the days
we hold in common   contain
the wraparound wings my mother sewed   she
who never wanted to repeat for us her
loneliness   we   Sancho Panza-like
help ourselves to carry a lance   a barber's
basin to catch the blood   a helmet or
blinders for a horse   he gallops into the
wind

I am left on dry hills
my primogeniture lost
to my sex: the lesbian gives birth to a son
but for my brother   who carries the name
there's no male heir on this
arid land   no rivers where we might
sell each other
for a name
my brother and I were   don quixote   and I
had the horse

Hermano Quijote

mi hermano y yo éramos don quijote
él tenía sus voces y yo   mi caballo
las aspas distorcionan la vista   el viento   nos empujaba de
cabeza
a arremeter los molinos gigantes

no fuimos nunca niños juntos   lo que compartimos en
común
contiene las anchas alas que cosió mi madre   ella que nunca
quizo repetir en nosotros su soledad   Nosotros   como
Sancho Panza
nos las arreglamos para esgrimir
una lanza   una jofaina de barbero y recoger   la sangre   un
casco
con ojeras de caballo   él galopa   contra el viento

me quedo en las colinas secas
mi primogenitura perdida   debido a mi sexo:
la lesbiana ha de parir un hijo
mas para mi hermano que lleva el nombre   no existe heredero
varón en esta
tierra árida   no hay ríos donde   vendernos el uno al otro
por un apellido

Mi hermano y yo fuimos don quijote   y yo
me fui al galope.

Blues

We woke up into the room of the dead
We already knew we had to
Tip-toe around
The awful stench of death
That is how we knew we survived: la vida
que llevo dentro y yo,
aún desde lejos.
Because at night our dreams
Reach for us with elongated
Arms

Caballo de muerte
No te acerques más
Que no me gusta tu semblante
Cara estilizada de caballo
Que me resbalo de tus ancas cada vez
Que mi alma pide cabalgar
Que me pateas con toda furia
Y te lanzas
A trotar a campo abierto
Ni que te persiguera el Diablo:
Tú eres el mentado satanás
Y a lo mejor es verdad
Que te persigue
Tal vez sea pura
Suerte que no me haya visto.

Dime:¿Qué sacas
Con darte vueltas, inquieto
Por el vecindario—acaso
No te basta con los que te has llevado?
Una parte mía, después
Otra
Como si todo se
Arreglara después con tu
Lamento.
Caballo de muerte: es verdad
Que me dormía cuando era hora
De arrancar libre
y dispuesta
a matarnos ambos en el mar
con tu melena entre
las piernas y tu cuello entre
mis brazos.
Lo que no entiendes es que
Yo nunca tuve piernas
Que me las cortaron al nacer
Y cada vez
Que he inventado otra manera de correr
Alguien viene a hacérmelas perder.
Por eso ahora, si
Me quedo quieta vivo más
Me he acostumbrado a vivir la vida
De por dentro

Y si me perdonaras algún día
Saldría corriendo contigo corriendo
Conmigo
Tú, mi caballo secreto
Yo, mi juventud
Y ella, la vida, manifestación misteriosa
y alada, que se posa sobre poetas, constelaciones,
y gotas de tiempo.

Footprints In The Past

The Fever

It's like a tangle of fibers that gather at my feet.
Within the sensation of disorder there is a smooth surface
perfect   that insinuates itself but vanishes. It's as thin as
breath. The tangle returns. I sense a voice speaking to me, a
certainty inside me says that the fear I had was about the
tangle… but later, much later, when I am desperate I grasp onto
an edge and recognize what it is: fear. Of the tangle of
fibers   *that is chaos.*

The Dream

There are several of them. The first one begins with a night. A
kind of walking through a city I don't know, though it seems
I've been there before. Its features are reminiscent. I need to
arrive there, in that space that reminds me and
I Go through streets I should know until I am lost
Irreparably, I know   chilled
Sometimes something strange happens. It seems as if I find a
memory within the dream and then I know I've been in that
city   in that old House   with those people
there. They know me. I know them.   We are *Of the old
ones*.
I walk back through streets that still do not take me to a familiar
place. I want to return to the place and, naturally, in trying to
return there is a crease in the dream. The streets have

changed it's another City and when I arrive I'm no longer the same and they're not.
I almost wake up and I believe that when I awaken for real I will solve the enigma of where I've been. But I do wake up and see that it's not possible.
That in my small life there hasn't been time to live that other life. To be that other girl who only emerges in dreams though the dream lingers like a memory, and in one of my future nights I will dream having been there again.

Many Years Later, There's the Bookcase
the time of the bookshelves happened then,
around the time of the fever and the dream
what is happening now is something marvelous
when suddenly the bookcase appears as a clue— I almost can't believe it
how simple it has been
only forty-three or forty-four
years to know why I'm afraid of that something.
Like all children I move as if I'm walking underwater.
Everything is a dream that weighs upon my eyelids. At times I move exceedingly fast, but in general, life moves slowly, summer vacations last seven months and sometimes longer.
When I go out to play hours go by and at each sidewalk there are cities by the curb, armies march by, and if there is a puddle of water after the rain, then naval battles and gloriously heroic

deaths. The greatest injustice is that the most entertaining
things in the world shold happen when it is time to go home.
Something similar happens with the bookcase.
There, among the toys, are all my books, the ones I read seven
times and my magazines. I don't know what the hell; that
bookcase
had a gnome that caused all the dis
order. Always. And especially
when someone came to visit   I had to put-things-in
order, the most difficult chore in the world. Trying to
carry it out I also took hours. I read magazines over
I procrastinated   it was
excruciantingly dificult. The mere dis—   order made me
nauseous gave me
stomach ache and yet
I couldn't. Evening arrived   the lights
yellowed
my arms like lead they weighed
tons and it was impossible. My mother came
to scold me while she led the charge and after
a while
the bookcase was tidied up.
Something had happened to that monster
mother had beaten it
inside remained a bitter taste because
the monster hovered about
the next day   those days that did not

last long the boocase would become dis- *ordered*
and I would be stranded in some
pirate ship
so I wouldn't be caught and sentenced
to make *order*…

Fever Once More

sometimes I saw the tangle as a consciousness that spoke to me   that knew me already because I was the girl who came in a ship, or Charon's Raft, feet first, delving deep into the night and the tangle itself was a weight over my feet, over my chest, a seated ghost, a smooth thing perfectly soft   a sphere of a milky color manifested there above my feet and I   grew desperate because if I were to wake I would feel the fever, the heat, all the parts that ached. And as I fell asleep seconds later I fell

Fever Again

And falling into that well   in that River I knew, I would find myself. I sank. I did not wake up except to sink down and there was my consciousness. The tangle was a weight over my feet, it was a tangle, it was   the smoothest thing on earth. It was a tangle, it was perfectly Order and disorder. It was chaos.
It was perfection.

Tunnels

To sleep was not the same as dreaming. Sleep ocurred at regular intervals regimented by sheets   freezing nights baldosas evenings by the heater the contrast of steel skies   red tile floor night did not fall the day did not break   it was only to sleep or not to sleep.
My dreams arrived here as if on a journey— where had they been? They arrived with suitcases.   I recognized them immediately with personalities and peculiarities, the dreams. Like books you begin to read again, the ones that began anew and the ones that continued the following night. Among them, I noticed the one about tunnels, tight spaces, chimneys, tombs, the underside of pyramids.
I was traveling, or trying to get back home; nothing was ever clear in this adventure. Except for the end, when I awakened suffocated. I had to pass through a very tight space. I had done it many times in the same dream: To climb up stairs   find an attic and scramble to the surface but in the end, no   space diminished   I got caught there was barely enough space for my head   I pushed with my shoulders not enough air I awakened because I did not want to go on: of that I was aware.

Head of a Snake

In the dream about getting lost there was a lot of ground to cover.
Sometimes I arrived in a city by train.
Getting off I realized that I didn't know how to find a neighborhood from a train station a familiar place   with

sidewalks houses trees corners stores kioskes— train stations
were downtown *Downtown* was for grownups while the life I
knew took place in neighborhoods. How did one get from one
place to the next? I did not understand transitions.
but in the dream about tunnels   or in the one about being
chased
(the door was made of flexible rubber that
did not reach the frame) a monster was chasing me
Sometimes I saw my own face emerging
a Giant the backdrop of dreams
an enormous face that spoke to me:
this is a dream   she said   don't be afraid
and I woke up   I untangled and emerged conscious on the
bed
remembering other dreams   a jungle   a large face
illuminating the pyramids
a girl's face   the body of an Aztec serpent
devouring itself— who was
that consciousness that protected me
that guided me through streets in dreams until
I found an old house with an iron gate
with tall windows, a lantern in the garden and inside
that salon where tea was served
I curtsied and they asked me to sing for them
the old ones:
beings without age with faces vanishing
faces impossible to remember but so precise that if I saw them

one random evening they would take me flying to that life
where I lived
until I was born once again.

Cycle of Nighmares

once I conquered the fever, years went by when I didn't get lost.. I could not remember, and I did not believe that all of that had been, could have been lived; to know that a handful of nightmares attacked me but I escaped. First into a tomb inside a pyramid that bore into the earth through a narrow passageway — I was an archeologist, crawling to get into the pyramid and there I suffocated, there was no way out except to go back, and up.

At the same time I dreamt I was lost in a new city
in a building with thousands of stairways, skylights
and balconies from which one could never see…
each floor spiraled up or emptied out into a street
a different one   while I choked inside the pyramid
digging in its entrails
pushing with my shoulders and elbows
irreparably lost through streets that never returned
to a building the same as before: the stairs
changed   the doors were blind   although light shone
through
suddenly my green serpent consciousness
spoke to me: this is a dream   I told myself
ask for directions. Instantly

I stopped two pedestrians to ask them—

My Footprints Recovered
perhaps they were two currents   an internal
birth and a culmination of an eternally long voyage
and obtaining directions to the convened place
I remember I ran through the dream as fast as I could
almost conscious   almost
dying from the anxiety not to awaken
until I arrived, I found the exit, the entrance, the hallway that
took me, the alleyway that opened up, the gates that opened,
along a lighted sidewalk, a brick wall, I went down steps and
there
they all were.
I don't remember who   but all of them
it was just that   it was just a matter of asking someone
I was laughing, though it was difficult for the lack of
oxygen— after all I was stuck in the pyramid
in the dream next door submerging into unconsciousness once
more
and I can only mumble that it was about a horrible fear
a terrible plunge into density until the muscles
in my neck and my breast   were beating   spasms of a last
effort to be born. There I awoke, first asleep but
soon I could really untangle and breathe   to look on the
screen

for the head that no longer spoke   that wasn't me   that
was
on me, of course   black snake   blue seas
ships
sailing toward navel-islands upon the glints of the sun over the
dark blue waves and I can open my eyes, breathe deeply, today,
I return.

Art Deco

It begins with a vision in the rain, I saw
caught in the Miami monsoon of
November, 1995.
At the small hotel by the bay, when neon
falters in the rain
pink veranda tables reflect
the moon or street light,
palms sway
an old woman stands guard by the piano
she wears a long necklace of black beads
she polishes black lacquer with a sleeve
she declaims:
This was my home__
my poppa owned the place, once.
She wears pastels
Woolworth's polyester and buffs
the piano bench, squints
at passing guests
keeps her suitcase by the door, brass
handles and cut glass.

Another woman tells a legend
about a spinster Aunt,
about a river that bled
very small pebbles jeweled
in sunlight
in the small town of Licantén.

In childhood hours last forever, distance
is compressed
the fabled river became all the rivers of the South
of Chile, 1959.
I dreamt my aunts washed my dark braids
in a basin of rainwater
collected in the sun
with quillay bark to make the soapy balm—
but perhaps it was their long hair
and not mine.
One day an aunt came to tea wearing
a long string of jet beads and a tall tale of gossip
I was coming home from school
wearing the white smock that kept my uniform clean
it was time to polish my shoes and write calligraphy
in my book—
but I lingered and listened to catch a few words
I kept vigil for stories, pebbles in hand
my aunt spoke about her great-Aunt during the days
of their own childhoods in the south, when
the jet beads served as an amulet against
sorrows & old maidenhood.

Black jet crystals: I swear to you that *azabache*
is a magic word. If you repeat
the incantation for a thousand million years
black shiny fossils will appear

in the carbonized tears of Araucaria
millenaria, conifers, cedar, ancient pinewood
from the shores Arabia to the virgin
forests of the southern hemisphere— the magic
is the same. The legend tells
of hands that carved each bead, the hands
that strung the crystals in a necklace the same hands
of a man who died: murdered
for his land   his daughter taken for a wife.
Those aunts never knew the man who died
his eyes open in the moonlight where the rivers meet
but they said
his eldest granddaughter bore the curse.

She was a woman promised by her father
to marry a man of pale features and black hair
that brushed the back of his shirt collar.
They lived in a world of
tall houses with narrow windows down to the floor
with locked bedchambers and skeleton keys
tied with satin cords to be carried close
to the bosom where
the iron keys jangled
against the beads of jet.
This, I invented
but behind the locked door the maiden aunt did cry
the man of the long hair gone

she locked herself away with her own black key…
in the morning the bride woke up pale and wan
locked in the bridal room, the necklace strewn about the broad
pine floors
buffed dark with hard wax to a mirror shine.

On a winter Tuesday my
black shoes were polished and I ran to school
at home my mother mourned an imperfect marriage
I daydreamed about the maiden who remained
jet necklace
satin dangling key
she locked the door and sent the new husband away
I would be the same, one day
my braids unbraided
my freedom bought
with the bitter loss of my only child.
Recuerdo una infancia   only
I wasn't a child and the
country
wasn't mine
but there were trains in my dreams
a track to return home
it was another dream where steam
spewed   then
subsided to reveal
a pale-faced girl in uniform facing

the future   whose?   perhaps
mine. But here
I wake only to see the green turning
greener
the rivers grow from   trickle to
melting ice in the
northern hemisphere Spring.

La Reina del Mal Humor

I

La Reina del Mal Humor (otrora Reina de Casca y Rabias)
me ha otorgado audiencia
me ha dicho que me acerque y ha prometido que con el tiempo
comprenderé lo que necesito: y en realidad el secreto
es que el tiempo
nunca es mío.
(Antes de escribir debo limpiar, barrer, despejar).
Ahora desfilo por su gran salón
y me pregunta:
"De que te sirvió limpiar la casa?"
"De nada" —digo yo
"Correcto," —dice ella.

Una paje limpia el suelo de baldosas con una pluma,
rombos de porcelana negros
y rojos; otra paje
se presenta escoba en mano; y otra
y otra. Y una a una se convierten
en pilares de mármol
frente al trono.
Las pálidas imágenes
no tienen más propósito que forzarme a dar
vueltas a su alrededor.
"Ya sabía que te gustaría deambular
en círculos" —dice ella
Pero, no me ordenaste que limpiara? (Me atrevo a pensar)

"Te atreves a bailar al son
de tus palabras?" —me interroga
"Daré una función" —digo, antes de quedar muda
y como magia entran por la derecha
al escenario, mis talentos, disfrazados,
mas, perdí el equilibrio—
alcancé a captar su mirada… cerró los ojos
las baldosas se abrieron por las orillas
dejándome caer abajo hasta la caldera
en mil destellos púrpuras y violetas
"Te has hecho corto-circuito
de tu propio ego" —tarareaba ella mientras
se limpiaba las uñas con una
uñeta— "eso mismo vale, digamos,
dos puntos, pero tú…" —levanté la cara,
ella se arrodilló a la orilla de la grieta
para susurrar:
"…tú necesitas cien".

II

El proscenio se ha cerrado, y
se ha abierto de nuevo. Retorna
el ritmo, mil flautas anuncian el comienzo
del segundo movimiento.
Entro a la escena por la izquierda
y ruego que me preste un guión: "acaso son éstas

las reglas de mi función?" —digo yo
sabiendo que las he escrito
yo misma.
La Reina del Mal Humor desciende
por cables para enfrentarme
desde el público
ahora se viste
con mi ropa, se ríe
con mi risa— hasta que una lluvia
de almohadones
me cae encima
"acurrúcate sobre ellos, *my dear*"
"bueno, sí…" —digo adormilada
"Ponte en pie!" —me grita,
la espuma de mar llega
en un oleaje
que lava el suelo de porcelana
me resbalo devastada
por la marea que apenas
me llega a los tobillos.
El agua se recoge
mientras brilla la oportunidad
maligna—
es una moneda que sujeta en la mano
"te lo crees, *my sweet*,
es sólo la debilidad de tu defensa…
acaso la aceptas?"

“por supuesto” —me sofoco. “He sido yo
la que ha escrito el guión—”
me resbalo en las baldosas
me rompo la mandíbula en los rombos
de porcelana
la sangre fluye roja por los negros
miedo
blanco
por los rojos.
“Qué buen gusto” —suspira
y deja caer la cortina.

III

Un largo tiempo transcurre
entre el segundo y tercer
movimientos— años
han pasado
he quedado tendida en la porcelana, mientras
la marea de cinco centímetros
ha surcado sobre mi cuerpo podrido
innumerables veces
el pelo se me ha enredado con arena
que no existe
este cuerpo hinchado destila
un olor putrefacto— siento grietas en la cara
de lágrimas saladas

que no he llorado…
“Ahora,” —declama la reina (mientras
considera sus vestimentas de algas verdes
y percala integral)
“ahora” —dice la reina
pateándome la carne
para que se me suelte de los huesos—
“ya has tenido suficiente?
me parece extraño” —(y su voz
sonaba particularmente conocida)
“que después de un período de, digamos—
inanición —te ves gorda, mi amor
y, contenta…” su voz desaparece con la marea.
Me di vuelta sobre el piso suave
me senté
apoyada en los codos
“este es un aparte” —me dije yo
a mí misma como público—
“debería levantarme y acabar
con esa reina!”
La Reina del Mal Humor asintió
desde las alas, donde
se pulía las uñas con mi guión.
“Pero tú absorbes procrastinación
como esponja, *my dear*.
Tú aprendes quedándote inerte,
y recostada

memorizas tu parte,
tus lecciones…”
“Correcto!” —me froté el cuerpo
para deshacerme
de lo podrido.
“Correcto” —me remedó
su figura difundiéndose
por la mía.
Se ha recogido la marea
la porcelana se ha desmoronado en arena
me acerco a la orilla
del entablado
mirando hacia abajo donde estoy sentada—
yo— tercera fila al medio
con los pies sobre el asiento
de la segunda fila,
y ella dice—
yo digo—
no había nadie en la escena.

“Tal como sospechaba,”
me di media vuelta
para irme, rompiendo mi entrada
en dos, disgustada
con la función.
“Tal como sospechaba,

ya sabía que no habría climax final,
y no se resolvería nada
en el tercer movimiento…”